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Meeting Notes

Attendees: See Attached List Date/Time: August 16, 2001

Project No.: 50885

Place: Derry Re: I-93

Notes taken by: Bruce A. Tasker

Jeff Brillhart opened the meeting and made introductions. He explained that this meeting is one of five Public Informational meetings being held by the Department in each of the communities along the study section of I-93 from Salem to Manchester. This meeting focuses on the section of I-93 in Derry beginning at the Derry /Windham Town line and running northerly through the Derry/ Londonderry Town line to north of Exit 4.

I-93 is a major interstate highway, and perhaps the major transportation link in NH. The Department is charged with improving the capacity and safety of an 18-mile section of I-93 that travels through 5 communities.

I-93 has a theoretical capacity to carry in the vicinity of 60,000 to 70,000 vpd. In the Salem area, the highway currently carries over 100,000 vpd and 70,000 in the Manchester area. By 2020, the projected volumes are approximately 140,000 vpd in Salem and 85,000 vpd in Manchester. The highway is over capacity today. Given the volume of vehicles on the highway, I-93 is less forgiving than it otherwise might be, and consequently less safe.

The Department is conducting the design and evaluation process using the format of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS follows five phases. The first phase or Scoping phase was completed in May 2000 with the publication of the Scoping Report. The second phase was completed in January 2001 with the publication of the Rationale Report. The Rationale Report documents the evaluation and screening of various alternatives. The recommendations in the Rationale Report include the following:

- Consider widening I-93 to be three lanes in each direction the entire length.
- Consider widening I-93 to be four lanes in each direction the entire length.
- Consider widening I-93 to be four lanes south of Exit 3 and three lanes north of Exit 3 in both directions.

- Construct park and ride lots at Exits 2, 3, and 5, and enhance the Exit 4 park and ride lot as appropriate.
- Expand existing bus service to Boston with stops at Exits 2, 3, and 5 as well as Exit 4.
- Enhance bus service by providing service between the NH park and ride lots and the industrial areas along I-93 in northern Massachusetts.
- Utilize Intelligent Transportation System Technology (ITS) and improve upon the Department's incident management capabilities.
- Incorporate TDM and TSM measures as practicable. The TSM would include short term, localized improvements to address immediate safety concerns and capacity improvements where possible. TDM measures include initiatives to encourage motorists to carpool, use bus service, telecommute, and otherwise make fewer trips, and thus reduce demand on the highway.

The Rationale Report also suggested that the Department not pursue the following:

- Constructing high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, as the ridership will not meet the threshold necessary to justify the lanes.
- Instituting rail service as part of this project. Ridership for any rail service would not diminish the need to widen the highway. However, the Report notes that rail service will in all likelihood be required in the future if NH is to maintain the level of mobility that is expected today. It is proposed that any widening of I-93 be done in such a manner as to retain the room for the possibility of a rail line in the highway corridor sometime in the future.

The Department is trying to coordinate with the State of Massachusetts and with the NH Congressional Delegation in an effort to conduct a more global study of the transportation needs of the region served by I-93 extending from Boston to Manchester. The study would concentrate on long-term needs and focus primarily on transit options. Having Massachusetts as a partner would allow for a more detailed discussion of the feasibility of the various transit alternatives.

The Department continues to hold monthly meetings with the environmental resource agencies. These Agencies appear to recognize the need to widen I-93 and correct deficiencies associated with the existing infrastructure. The agencies feel that serious studies need to be carried forward now relative to rail service and some feel that perhaps these studies should be done as part of the current highway study and to the same degree of detail, as opposed to concurrently with the highway widening studies.

The Agencies also feel strongly that the improvements to I-93 will result in substantial secondary impacts to natural resources. That is, by improving I-93, NH becomes more accessible which entices more development for homes and businesses, which in turn impacts natural resources.

To address to what degree and where these secondary impacts might occur, the Department, at EPA's urging, is utilizing an Expert Panel to evaluate the issue. The panel of experts in the fields of land use, development and economic issues are being asked to answer questions relative to what the future might hold if I-93 is widened or not widened. Hopefully, the Panel will reach some consensus or provide a range of possible scenarios so the Resource Agencies and the people of New Hampshire can understand the implications of widening I-93.

Jeff noted that the Department has been meeting with Massachusetts's officials to learn about their project to consider what might be done to improve the stretch of I-93 through Methuen and

Andover where shoulders are allowed to carry traffic during peak travel periods. These officials are interested in a joint NH/MA study of the I-93 corridor and long term transit needs.

The Department, State Police, FHWA and local safety (police and fire) organizations meet regularly to consider what steps might be taken to improve incident management capabilities; that is, addressing accidents along I-93 in a more timely manner to minimize delays to motorists. This initiative is still in the early stages, but the communication has been very helpful and it appears that the efforts will result in very positive improvements for the motorists in terms of reducing delays along the highway due to accidents or incidents.

Bike trails along I-93 are now being considered as part of the widening layouts. A larger study of the north/south biking needs from the State Line to Concord will incorporate findings relative to the I-93 bike trail with consideration of using the abandoned rail corridor and roadway shoulders along other state and local roadways.

Jeff provided an overview of public feedback heard from the various local meetings. That feedback focused on the need to:

- Begin widening construction as soon as possible.
- Minimize impacts to private properties.
- Construct sound barriers to screen and shield neighborhoods.

Jeff also noted that the public, in a broad sense, feels that a 4-lane widening should be done vs. the 3-lane widening, with the idea that a 3-lane widening would require additional widening soon after the 3-lane widening is complete. The Resource Agencies appear to recognize the need to widen I-93 and correct the deficiencies associated with the existing infrastructure, however they may feel that I-93 should only be widened to 3-lanes. The Department has not made a decision at this time. The Department also recognizes that for a number of sections along the corridor, 4-lanes will need to be constructed at least temporarily to allow for two lanes of traffic in each direction during construction. For the 3-lane alternative the additional traffic control lane would be removed.

The individual towns have also expressed their particular concerns relative to how the project affects their communities.

For Salem a primary issue has been that the project not exacerbate the flooding that occurs in the Town and within the Spickett River watershed today.

For Windham and Salem, a predominant issue has been the need to address water quality and highway runoff, especially with Canobie Lake and Corbett's Pond located adjacent to the corridor. Windham is also very much interested in ways to reduce the overall footprint of the highway and the Exit 3 interchange. Today the existing median between the NB and SB barrels at the Exit 3 interchange is as much as 1,200 feet wide. Windham would like to see the interchange look more like Exit 2, 4 or 5 with much smaller footprints.

In Londonderry and Salem, the neighborhoods have expressed concern about the proposed park and ride lots and the impacts on their quality of life. Various alternatives or means of minimizing impacts are being considered.

Jeff noted that the plans are still very preliminary and are subject to change. The plans will be modified based on input the Department receives at the various meetings. There still needs to be quite a bit of design done before they are complete enough to fully address impacts.

Tony Grande briefly described the 200 scale colored plans for the proposed improvements for the section of I-93 beginning at the Derry /Windham Town line and running northerly to the Stonehenge Road crossing in Londonderry. The plans presented depict a 4-lane widening of I-93. Plans are also available which depict a 3-lane widening option. For either widening alternative, there are two concepts in the Exit 4 area. The two concepts include widening I-93 all to the east, (the westerly edge of the SB barrel is held) or all to the west (the easterly edge of the NB barrel is held).

Tony noted the layouts are similar to those previously presented at other meetings, but have been updated with more detailed design. The details include the addition of rounded slope lines, drainage treatment basins and swales, proposed right-of-way, building acquisitions, retaining walls and potential sound wall locations.

I-93 Widening

Beginning near the Windham/Derry Town line, the I-93 design in this area is controlled by the recently replaced and widened North Lowell Road bridges where the inside median edges of both the NB and SB barrels are held and the widening occurs to the outside. To the north, the NB barrel widening shifts to the west holding the outside edge of the NB barrel. The SB barrel shifts to the west to allow for the NB widening and to provide for an area in the median for a possible future rail. At Kendall Pond Road and in the area near the Londonderry sewer treatment facility the widening remains to the west.

There are two options for widening I 93 between Kendall Pond Road through the Exit 4 interchange and Ash Street to Stonehenge Road.

The first option involves widening I-93 to the east.

This alternative would retain the existing SB ramps by holding the westerly edge of the existing I-93 SB barrel with all widening of the SB barrel and construction of the NB barrel occurring to the east. Provision for space to accommodate future rail is preserved in the median. By retaining the existing SB ramp infrastructure, the cost of ledge removal and traffic control is reduced. Also, the existing Exit 4 park and ride facility would not be impacted. The configuration of the NB ramps would be retained, but the ramps would be shifted to the east to accommodate the highway widening. This option shifts the I-93 NB barrel closer to Wheeler Pond and the adjacent wetland area. No construction is expected to be required in the pond, although some impacts to the wetlands would occur, but could be minimized by the construction of retaining walls or steepening the highway slopes. This alternative would shift the widening into portions of the wetland area in the vicinity of Beaver Brook and the sewerage treatment plant south and east of the Exit 4 interchange. Impacts could possibly be minimized by the construction of retaining walls or steepening the highway slopes. North of the Exit 4-interchange area, the widening continues to hold the westerly edge of the SB barrel. The space to accommodate future rail is continued in the median. This shift impacts a house on the westerly end of Red Lane and the pavement and loading area for two commercial buildings (Londonderry Commercial Center and Stom Commercial Park) along the westerly side of Londonderry Drive. This option would also impact a portion of the wetlands located between the I-93 NB barrel and Seasons Lane, just north of Ash Street. In the vicinity of Stonehenge Road, the widening of the highway and the bridges over Stonehenge Road occurs to the outside for both the NB and the SB barrels.

The second option involves widening I-93 to the west.

This alternative would hold the easterly edge of the existing I-93 NB barrel and maintain the widening of I-93 to the west as proposed in the area near Kendall Pond Road. All

widening of the NB barrel and construction of the SB barrel would occur to the west. Provision for space to accommodate future rail is preserved in the median. This concept would shift away from Wheeler Pond and associated wetlands and the Beaver Brook wetland area. No construction would be required in the pond. Some impacts to the wetlands could occur, but may be minimized by the construction of retaining walls or steepening the highway slopes. The westerly shift will require the realignment and reconstruction of the SB on and off-ramps. The layout would require substantial rock removal for the reconstruction of the SB ramps. The realignment of the SB ramps would impact the existing park and ride facility and require reconstruction and development of replacement parking. (Current facility is at capacity). Reconstruction and realignment of the SB ramps will also create substantial traffic control issues while trying to maintain traffic during the removal of the high rock adjacent to traffic. North of the Exit 4-interchange area, the westerly shift continues to hold the easterly edge of the NB barrel north from the Exit 4-interchange area. The widening occurs west into the existing median area and the space to accommodate future rail is continued in the median. This option would impact a portion of the wetlands in the Pillsbury Brook area located just north of the Pillsbury Road overpass adjacent to Trolley Car Lane on the west side of the SB barrel. In the vicinity of Stonehenge Road, the widening of the highway and the bridges over Stonehenge Road occurs to the outside for both the NB and the SB barrels

NH 102

The proposed improvements for NH102 can be used with either of the easterly or westerly I-93 widening options noted. NH 102 would be generally realigned south of existing NH 102. This would allow the use of the existing bridge to maintain traffic while the new bridge is completed. The new bridge will provide for 2-EB thru lanes, 2-EB left turn lanes, 2-WB thru lanes, a single right-turn lane and 5-foot shoulders and sidewalks. The westerly approach work can be completed in the vicinity of the existing NH 102 EB to I-93 SB on-ramp. The proposed NH 102 realignment will tie back to the existing alignment just west of the Burger King drive. The proposed 7-lane section on the NH 102 bridge will transition to a 5-lane section in the vicinity of the Burger King drive and then transition to a 3-lane section (similar to the existing lane use) near Londonderry Drive.

Ash Street/Pillsbury Road Bridge over I-93

The Ash Street/Pillsbury Road Bridge over I-93 would be replaced to accommodate the I-93 widening and the area in the median being preserved for future rail. Two options are under consideration. The first option is an "off-line" alternative that would realign and reconstruct approximately 2500 feet of Ash Street/Pillsbury Road to the south. The existing bridge would be used to maintain traffic during construction and removed after the traffic is shifted to the new structure. The new bridge would have two 12-foot lanes, 5-foot shoulders and a 5-foot sidewalk. The Ash Street/Pillsbury Road southerly realignment would minimize impacts to wetlands in the area and to a potentially historic parcel in the NW quadrant. East of I-93 on the south side of Ash Street, two businesses would be impacted. The second option is an "on-line" option. The existing bridge would be replaced in its existing location. The new structure would also have two 12-foot lanes, 5-foot shoulders and a 5-foot sidewalk. A temporary detour bridge would be constructed to the south of the existing bridge to maintain traffic.

Sound Barriers

Five noise barrier locations between the Windham /Derry Town line and the Stonehenge Road area. Locations under consideration are being evaluated:

- I-93 SB near Tracey Drive

- I-93 NB near Matthew Drive, Derryfield Road and Friar Tuck Lane
- I-93 SB near Charleston Drive
- I-93 SB near Trolley Car Lane
- I-93 NB near Seasons Lane

Property Acquisitions (excluding out buildings)

Tony identified the locations of the various homes and businesses that may be acquired as part of the highway improvements through this segment. The total number of acquisitions would vary depending upon which options they include:

<u>I-93 East or West Widening</u>	Spinnaker Drive (2 ho. - ledge)	2 Ho.
<u>I-93 East Widening</u>	Red Lane (1 ho.); Recor Trading (1 com.)	1 Ho.; 1 Com.
<u>I-93 West Widening</u>	Sta. 1690 SB (1 ho.); Recor Trading (1 com.)	<u>1 Ho.; 1 Com.</u>
		Totals: 3 Ho.; 1 Com.

Bike Trail

A bike trail is also shown in a very conceptual format along the I-93 corridor. The bike trail would begin at the Exit 2 park & ride lot and fit into the highway construction running northerly to the Exit 5 area. Potential connectivity to local roads, park and ride lots, and the regional bike network is being considered. Through the Exit 4 area, the path would continue to parallel the NB barrel up to Fordway and then cross over to parallel the SB barrel. The trail would continue north and cross NH 102, have access to the park & ride lot and continue north along the SB barrel. At Pillsbury Road, depending on the east or west widening, the trail would be placed on the same side where the widening will take place.

Jeff Brillhart noted the schedule for similar meetings to be held along the corridor. The Salem Public Informational meeting was held on July 30, 2001.

- August 28, Windham
- August 30, Londonderry
- September 6, Manchester

Jeff also mentioned that another series of meetings will occur this fall and again this winter.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) should be completed early in 2002.

The Public Hearing is expected to be in the March/April 2002 timeframe. This is a formal meeting, which begins the approval process. Assuming the layout is acceptable, approval for the project would be forthcoming in the fall 2002. At that time, Final Design can begin as well as the process to acquire right-of-way. Construction is programmed to begin in 2004.

Questions/Comments:

- Comment: Do you foresee these plans changing much over the next year? You have identified certain properties as potentially being acquired. Will you be acquiring these early?
- Jeff Brillhart: Typically the Department wouldn't buy any properties before approval of the project. There are exceptions, however, involving hardships, but the Department and

the Federal Highway Administration are generally reluctant to buy property before obtaining approvals.. Once the Public Hearing is held and we have a better idea of what will be done, and an alternative has been chosen, then property can be acquired.

Comment: There are two properties along Spinnaker Drive that will be impacted no matter which alternative is chosen.

Jeff Brillhart: Currently, the two properties are still under evaluation. The need to acquire the two properties can depend on whether or not the ground adjacent to the highway is firm ledge or not. If not, the properties would be impacted because the grading of the embankment would extend into the homes. If firm ledge is encountered, we may not have to buy them because the grading area can be reduced.

Tony Grande: There are two different impact lines shown on the plans. One line reflects what the impacts would be with a standard ledge cut line which is the line closer to I-93 widening, and the other, which shows a greater impact, is the minimum impact if the ground encountered is not firm ledge.

Comment: One of those properties being impacted is my property and is currently on the market for sale. Who do I contact regarding this?

Jeff Brillhart: It would be a good idea if you could write a letter alerting the Department of the details of your situation. The merits of your situation can then be reviewed and acted upon.

Comment: One of the problems with the NB barrel today in the area between Exit 2 and Exit 3 is that the sun can blind the driver. Is there any thought as to how that can be alleviated?

Jeff Brillhart: I am not aware of anything that can readily solve that problem. The highway alignment and grade will likely remain the same, so the glare from the sun would be generally the same. I know that the Department tries to install median paddles to reduce headlight glare at night. The situation will be discussed with the Department's maintenance personnel.

Comment: This highway will make this area like Nashua. I moved out of Nashua because I didn't like the traffic. This is really going to spoil the area.

Comment: I can see the merits of a rail alternative or something that takes cars off that road. But I question the consideration of a bike path because I don't see commuters using that. Is the bike path idea just to appease the few critics that don't want to see the highway widened?

Jeff Brillhart: A bike path is going to have little effect on drawing traffic from the highway. Bicycle travel is a form of transportation so it is being considered statewide. If you feel strongly that bike trails should not be considered, let your local and regional representatives know, and continue to raise the issue at project meetings.

Comment: Will I be notified of the Public Hearing?

Jeff Brillhart: All abutters to I-93, you will be getting a certified letter informing them of the public hearing. If you send a letter identifying your concerns now, it will be answered. But

it would also be a good idea to make sure the Special Committee hears your concerns.

Comment: Has bus service been used anywhere else in the country and has it eliminated major road construction?

Jeff Brillhart: I don't know of any place in the country where bus service has eliminated the need to make major highway improvements. The Rationale Report, which is available for review on the Department's website, discusses the fact that bus service will draw a small percentage of potential highway users off the highway in the best of circumstances. With that said, the Department is proposing to expand and enhance existing bus service in NH and provide travelers additional options during and following the widening construction.. One of the first things to be done as part of this project is to construct the park and ride lots and get the additional bus services up and running.

Comment: If you get people accustomed to using public transportation locally, then it would be easier to transition them into using public transportation on the highway.

Jeff Brillhart: With this project, the Department is trying to improve transit service along a major transportation corridor. Hopefully the public will take advantage of the additional services.

Comment: From my perspective, people enjoy their freedom of travel by car too much and transit service will continue to be only lightly used.

Using a bus or a train is great if you are going to downtown Boston, but what if you work at many of the other places out on Route 128 in Massachusetts? The State already has bus service that goes to Boston, but it is being underutilized.

Comment: When construction begins, will a minimum of two travel lanes be maintained in both directions?

Jeff Brillhart: We need to have two lanes in both directions as much as possible. For example, on I-93 over Bodwell Road project in Manchester where the Department has a project to replace four bridges, the sequencing utilized two lanes at nearly all times.

Comment: Are you building three-lane bridges or four-lane bridges at Bodwell Road? It seems like you said previously you were building three-lane bridges, which will then be rebuilt a second time for four-lanes in the future.

Jeff Brillhart: Regarding the bridges, back in 1988 the Department initiated the I-93 widening project. The Department started with meetings in the Town of Salem. The idea was to widen that section of I-93 and then proceed to the north over a period of years and by the year 2001 or so this project would be all done. This didn't happen because the environmental agencies felt strongly that the highway needed to be looked at in its entirety and not in a piecemeal fashion. As a result, the Department had to look at the entire section of the I-93 corridor, prepare an EIS, and develop a statewide traffic model, and the bridges that were intended to be replaced or rehabilitated as the highway was widened didn't get fixed in a timely manner as originally intended. When the Department contacted the Resource Agencies to discuss the very poor

condition of the bridges and asked for approval to over-widen the bridges for traffic control purposes and so that they would not have to be redone again in the future, the agencies felt that if the bridges were over-widened, the additional width would possibly dictate how the highway should be widened in the future. The agencies felt that without studying the whole corridor you can't make a decision as to which side a bridge should be over-widened. The Department and the agencies did not agree at first, so the early bridge improvements were fixed or replaced with 2-lanes only. As the Department considered more bridges along I-93 that were in poor condition, additional discussions were held with the agencies. Over time, the agencies agreed that the bridges could be over-widened to maintain traffic during construction. As a result, some of the improved bridges were over-widened for traffic control purposes and they were over-widened in a way that can accommodate the widening of I-93 to the north and south of the bridge. The bridges at Bodwell Road are being over-widened for traffic control purposes, but the over-widening can accommodate a 3-lane barrel in each direction. The sound wall location and the ledge removal are being done to accommodate a 4-lane section in each direction if need be.

- Comment: Has air pollution been looked at? Cars that aren't moving generate a lot more pollution. Also, if you don't widen the highway, it is a disincentive for tourists to visit and if you do widen it, it is an incentive for tourists. Have there been any projections developed to compare the air pollution with and without the highway widening?
- Jeff Brillhart: That study has not been completed as yet. Air quality will be evaluated for all the alternatives including the three-lane widening, the four-lane widening and the no-build, base line condition. We need to see how this project effects the air quality problem that we have in New Hampshire today.
- Comment: It is unclear to me that we need four lanes, both ways at all times. Has there been any thought to doing what was done on the Central Artery with some type of reversible lanes?
- Jeff Brillhart: Reversible lanes require considerable costs to implement and maintain on a daily basis. In places like Boston, where they have developed reversible lanes, it's generally because they have no other choice; the space available for widening the highway is limited. In NH, the Department does not think that reversible lanes would be a better investment, particularly in the winter. Our choice would be not to go that route.
- Tony Grande: One of the other considerations for this project is that we are trying to reserve room for a rail down in the median. It would be difficult to provide for a reversible lane at the same time as having rail in the median.
- Comment: Two Sundays ago around 2:00 in the afternoon, I was heading SB into Massachusetts from Derry and the traffic was moving very slowly beginning around Exit 2. There wasn't any accident. It appears that people were heading home a little early because of rain to the north. On a Sunday afternoon, I-93 was completely congested because of traffic. There is an incredible amount of traffic on that road.
- Jeff Brillhart: Exit 2 today is a section of I-93 that creates congestion because of the geometrics of the SB on and off-ramps. Two ramps have a very short weave area between them, and that makes the through traffic reduce speed creating backups.

- Comment: There has been much discussion about commuters and where people work. The second element as to who uses I-93 is that I-93 is the Gateway for our tourism and recreation. Traffic congested both NB and SB does not sit well with the tourism industry.
- Comment: Should the Towns be asking you for copies of these plans?
- Jeff Brillhart: The plans are still conceptual, but with that said, it would probably be helpful to send plans to the communities.
- Comment: As I understand it, this is a State and Federal project, and while the Town may have input, but they really don't have the final say.
- Jeff Brillhart: This project is very important to the entire State. It is also very important to all of the five communities it passes through and the communities have a great deal of influence on what gets done. The Department is certainly considering what the towns say at each of the meetings, and that input is reflected in the alternatives being developed.
- Comment: If there is going to be impacts on the Town, it's good the Town knows about it, because, for instance, Broadway coming off of I-93 North is already a very congested around 5:00 PM coming up to the Fordway. If you add capacity to I-93, something is going to have to be done at the Town's level to keep traffic from backing up onto the ramp. The towns need to start thinking about what they are going to do.
- Jeff Brillhart: There is actually a project, Exit 4A, in Town that is moving along and that would help address that problem. The Towns have been pro-active and are looking at what they need to do.
- Comment: Have you looked at the area of Pelham Road in Salem? There is always a backup to I-93.
- Tony Grande: There is an upcoming interim project where all of the signals along Pelham Road will be coordinated which will help that situation somewhat. This is one of the other reasons why, not just in Salem or here, but at each of the interchanges, you see the cross roadways being widened to improve overall operations. The proposed final improvement would completely reconstruct the Exit 2 interchange with more lanes on the ramps and along Pelham Road.